

Public Health Committee Public Hearing March 14, 2022

Testimony in Support of HB 5364 and SB 367

Submitted by Geralyn Laut, BS, MA, CPP, CTTs

Executive Board Member of Amplify, the Region 4 RBHAO

**Member of the MATCH Coalition and former member of
the CT Tobacco and Health Trust Fund Board**

My name is Geralyn Laut and I reside at 126 South Mill Drive in Glastonbury, CT.

For the record, I'm not on anybody's payroll, I'm not a lobbyist or paid policy advocate for a non-profit or health care organization. I am however certified as both a Prevention Professional and a Tobacco Treatment Specialist with experience dating back to the mid 80's when I first facilitated a program called SMOKEWISE. Hence, I've seen firsthand over and over again, the powerful hold of nicotine addiction and the lethal consequences of tobacco use in all its forms.

When asked what I did for work, I'd often respond that I liked to think I saved lives, or at least extended the length and quality of life for many individuals. In turn, I believed I helped prevent tobacco use initiation for when I helped a parent quit smoking his or her children were far less likely to start, and those same children escaped the harmful effects of 2nd hand smoke. I also took pride in knowing that my efforts to prevent youth smoking and more recently vaping, also dramatically reduced their risk of succumbing to other addictions. As you've heard repeatedly today, nicotine alters adolescent brain development damaging neurons while also priming the brain to be more responsive to dopamine inducing chemicals. The dopamine effects are exacerbated when smoking is combined with alcohol and other drugs, thus the reason we see so much dual addiction, with many persons in recovery unable to give up their first drug, i.e nicotine.

I know my colleagues from the ALA, ACS and AHA have highlighted statistics and the many reasons CT must invest more of our monies from the Tobacco

Settlement in the ways it was intended... comprehensive programs to include Education and Prevention, Cessation and Treatment, and Environmental and Policy initiatives. Simply put, smoking is the leading cause of preventable death (and I believe a significant risk factor for the many tragic deaths associated with Covid). Those with mental illness, low income and minorities and members of the LGBTQ population are the most vulnerable to tobacco use and deserve focused interventions. The current \$1 million dollar appropriation is far from enough and ideally should be \$12 million or more, with plans to maintain the same level of funding in subsequent years. We must invest in programs that combat the predatory marketing of the tobacco industry targeting our youth and encourage and support those who currently smoke (or vape) to quit, using approved cessation medications and strategies and not the electronic delivery devices touted by the industry as safe alternatives.

We cannot begin to calculate the future death toll associated with vaping and or the cost of related medical illnesses, but we can assume there will be consequences, and without a doubt financial loss for both the individual and to those financing related health care. Eliminating flavored products will be a deterrent for youth to begin vaping. There is no doubt that the age-old adage clearly applies here, that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”!

I feel confident that I am speaking on behalf of the Amplify Board of Directors and the many local prevention councils, youth advocates and concerned parents in the Amplify region, who believe that the State of Connecticut must and can do more to eliminate a leading cause of death and disability starting now, and in the years to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Geralyn Laut

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